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A NORWEGIAN TAPESTRY DESIGNER'S QUAIN PRODUCTIONS.



GERHARD MUNTHE is a Norwegian artist who has devoted much study to the particular branch of art in which he is better known. As an able and versatile decorator he has been appreciated for a considerable number of years, but early in the present decade he suddenly deviated from the trodden paths of his art, and produced a number of compositions which both in design and execution showed a distinct departure from the commonplace of modern decoration.

When first exhibited in Christiana his works aroused quite exceptional interest, and in Paris and Venice they have recently attracted considerable attention.

An idea of the nature and character of these compositions may be obtained from the tapestry designs here illustrated, and in spite of the fact that they have been greatly reduced in reproduction and lack the pleasant coloring of the originals, they nevertheless give a fair impression of what the artist intends to convey.

The main motive of his work is to retain that which is national and traditional. He has on several occasions publicly stated his views upon tradition, and I cannot do better than quote the following passage from an article written by him:

"Each nation must be regarded as an individual, its own predispositions and its own likings, just as also it possesses its own train of ideas. Each nation naturally feeds on spiritual nourishment from without, and, according to its temperament, derives good from it or



TAPESTRY DESIGN, "THE DAUGHTERS OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS." BY GERHARD MUNTHE.

otherwise. To what extent anything may become incorporated in the nation as 'tradition' depends on the degree in which it can be assimilated. Tradition is, therefore, not what many believe it to be—viz., ancient romance or history. The first condition demanded of a nation by tradition is that it can be, as it were, digested by it, absorbed by it, and tradition therefore depends largely upon the developing power of the nation itself."

From this view of the importance of nationalism and

tradition Munthe has developed his decorative art. He has studied carved work and sculpture in old churches and dwellings, the old poetry of the Sagas, folklore and melodies, the old art of tapestry, the floral painting of the peasantry, and everything connected with the art of that portion of the population, its nucleus and its regenerative powers up to the present day.

In this way he has initiated himself into the very world of Norwegian idea, "and it is," he says, "individual



TAPESTRY DESIGN, "WORKRAD." BY GERHARD MUNTHE.

and simple as a book printed in large type." This peculiar world of thought and tradition may be traced back for ages, and, notwithstanding its decadence of late years, it is still to the fore, despite all foreign influence.

Munthe is of opinion that one cannot advance in art by merely thoughtlessly copying traditional colors and designs. One must become imbued with the spirit and meaning conveyed or transmitted by tradition; one must live, in fact, in its way of thinking and its world of fantasy.

He builds up his work upon every kind of design to be found in our hereditary art, but often perceives in the old Norwegian tapestry that art which he, with predilection, uses for his own purposes. It is, as he himself calls it, a distinguished and fastidious art which easily makes all that is hackneyed. In it he discovers the strong yet sober colors and the simple designs which we meet with in his works.

Gerhard Munthe has thus, in his decorative branch, gained knowledge from every source of national art, but he only devotes himself to its deepest characteristics. He never employs the Norwegian *flora* or *fauna* in designing, just as little, indeed, as these have been used in former ages. It is his opinion that the Norwegian train of ideas is far removed from the "quiet flowers in a row," and has a claim rather to be led in the direction of everything romantic and strong.

The ideas and incidents of the two designs here reproduced do not refer to any known legends. They are original in conception. Mr. Munthe calls one of these "The Daughters of the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) and their Suitors."

Another illustration is called "Workrad," from a Norwegian word signifying "afraid of the gloom"—that curious sensation proceeding from excited imagination which makes one fancy that there are creatures stealing about and staring at you from the corners of a room.